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5 Martin Luther King, Civil Rights, and Perceptions of a "Communist Conspiracy"

MATTHEW L. HARRIS

In the early 1990s members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints performed sacred temple rituals for acclaimed civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. It occurred during the LDS church presidency of Ezra Taft Benson—a remarkable irony considering Benson's decades-long opposition to Dr. King.[1] Dead for nearly twenty-four years at the time of the ritual, the famed civil rights spokesman became the recipient of an important Mormon ordinance allowing for persons to accept or reject the Mormon gospel in an afterlife if they did not encounter while they lived. There is no evidence that King, a southern Baptist minister, had exposure to Mormonism because for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Mormon Church did not proselytize among black people.[2] In addition, from 1852 to 1978, LDS leaders prohibited persons of African descent from holding the priesthood or participating in sacred temple rituals, bluntly proclaiming they were under a divine curse for sinful conduct in a premortal life.[3]

Mormonism's restrictive racial practices occurred during much of Benson's adult life, which affected how he viewed people of color. Like his fellow apostles, he referred to black people as the "seed of Cain" and actively opposed civil rights during the turbulent decades after World War II. Benson and his colleagues feared that civil rights legislation would break down racial barriers, making it easier for blacks and whites to integrate and thereby marry.[4] But Benson went further than his fellow general authorities in opposing civil rights. Radicalized by right-wing extremism, the apostle came to believe in the 1960s that communists had infiltrated the civil rights movement. He alleged that Dr. King and his allies collaborated with Soviet agents in a secret plot to destroy American democracy and capitalism.

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For more than a quarter century Benson's antiblack views influenced how some Latter-day Saints viewed Dr. King and the civil rights movement. This essay examines how Benson developed such views and more importantly, how they polarized the LDS church.

* * *

After Ezra Taft Benson finished his government service in 1961 and resumed his duties as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, he became more vocal in speaking out against communism. Importantly, he viewed the fledging civil rights movement as a subplot to a larger communist conspiracy. The apostle's views on civil rights derived from the writings of two non-Mormons whom he admired: J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI, and Robert Welch, founder of the John Birch Society, the most extreme anticommunist organization in the United States. Both men impressed upon him that communism and civil rights were inextricably linked and that civil rights leaders were witting agents in a worldwide communist conspiracy to enslave the American people.

Benson met the controversial FBI director in 1952 when he requested a background check after Eisenhower named him to his presidential cabinet.[5] Though the two men were never close, the admiring Mormon apostle extolled Hoover as the "best informed-man in government on the socialist-communist conspiracy" and praised his efforts exposing the aims and tactics of communists.[6] Hoover's 1958 bestselling book, *The Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism and How to Fight It*, had an enormous impact on Benson, as did Hoover's other principal writing, *A Study of Communism*, published in 1962. Hoover sent him copies of both books when they were published and Benson cherished the gifts as newfound treasures. The books exposed Benson to communist aims and strategies, particularly how they used schools, the media, and the television and radio industries to spread their communist propaganda. "I am most grateful for your exposure of the communist conspiracy and for the wonderful organization you have established in the F.B.I.," he gushed to Hoover in 1965. "I pray that your courage will continue and that your hand will be blessed and prospered in all that you do to preserve our Constitutional Republic."[7]

On several occasions Benson conveyed to Hoover his earnest desire to have the director tutor him on the communist conspiracy. He asked Hoover's permission to reprint his speeches and writings in LDS publications, and on more than one occasion he invited the director to speak in Utah, both at the Mormon Church's annual general conference in Salt Lake City and at a devotional assembly at the church-owned and operated Brigham Young University.[8]

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For Benson, Hoover's books were "must reading."[9] In *Masters of Deceit*, a book Benson quoted often, Hoover expressed alarm at how the party had used "the Negro . . . to exploit him and use him as a tool to build a communist America."[10] From Hoover's writings, Benson learned about an alleged long history that communists had with civil rights leaders, in which crafty, enterprising reds tried to infiltrate black organizations and groups, in an effort to pursue social and political equality. But at the same time, Hoover opined, communist leaders did not have much luck because they had a difficult time indoctrinating "any large number of Negroes."[11]

In *A Study of Communism*, Hoover called the civil rights movement a communist-front group, which acted as a "main sphere" for the communist agenda.[12] Hoover asserted that civil rights leaders created chaos with their demands for racial justice, thereby weakening American democracy and laying the foundation for communism. He first advanced this idea before the U.S. Congress in 1958, vigorously affirming that "The Negro situation is . . . being exploited fully and continuously by Communists on a national scale." In 1962, Hoover again warned a congressional committee that communists were using civil rights organizations to advance their nefarious agenda.[13]

In particular, Hoover was concerned that Stanley Levison and Bayard Rustin, both former members of the Communist Party, had joined forces with Martin Luther King. Alarmed, he secured a wiretap from Attorney General Robert Kennedy in 1962 to begin surveilling King and his associates, in a brazen effort to discredit the civil rights leader.[14] Moreover, King's "I Have a Dream" speech, delivered to a quarter million civil rights supporters on the steps at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963, just a short distance from FBI headquarters, further alarmed Hoover. King's enormous popularity, and the influence he had over thousands of civil rights supporters, led the Bureau to call him the "most dangerous and effective Negro leader in the country."[15]

Predictably, King responded to the communist charges with bewilderment and anger. "I'm getting sick and tired of people saying that this movement has been infiltrated by Communists. There are as many Communists in this freedom movement as there are Eskimos in Florida," he angrily explained.[16] There is no credible evidence that King or his associates were communists. The wiretaps reveal that King condemned communism and that Levison, Rustin, and other erstwhile members of the Communist Party were no longer active. Still, Hoover had little regard for the truth. He viewed King as a threat to him, and he spent much of the 1960s trying to besmirch him and undermine the movement he led.[17]

Ezra Taft Benson, of course, had no knowledge of what was going on behind the scenes at FBI headquarters, but he trusted the director's honesty and

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perspicuity. Years later, when Hoover's crusade against King was exposed,[18] the Mormon apostle brushed it off as the work of critics who embraced "the international Communist conspiracy."[19]

Another formative influence on Benson came from a little-known candy maker named Robert Welch, who founded the John Birch Society in 1958.[20] During the 1960s the Birch founder and the apostle exchanged dozens of letters, met numerous times, and strategized on how best to fight communism and big government.[21] So close and collaborative were the two men that Welch invited Benson to join the Birch Society and serve on its board. However, LDS church president David O. McKay rebuffed both requests, proclaiming the JBS too controversial.[22] Even so, Benson vigorously promoted the Birch Society throughout his life, praising it as "the most effective organization in our fight against creeping socialism and godless communism."[23] Benson was so enamored with the John Birch Society that he invited Welch to relocate the Birch Headquarters to Midway, Utah, next to the cottage that Benson purchased in 1967.[24]

The Mormon apostle eagerly read everything Welch had written. In particular, *The Politician*, Welch's signature work, impressed him, as did the articles in the *American Opinion*, a Birch magazine, and the *Birch Bulletin*, a monthly newsletter. *The Politician*, written in 1958 and ultimately published in 1963, electrified Benson. He found the book "shocking" and "most convincing," asserting that President Eisenhower, "so strong for Christian principles and basic American concepts," could be "so effectively used as a tool to serve the communist conspiracy."[25] Benson studied the work carefully and referred to it repeatedly throughout his ministry. He sent it to his colleagues in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, praising it as "essential reading"—"one of the most shocking volumes you have ever read."[26] To FBI director J. Edgar Hoover he called it "a most significant and alarming volume." He ordered copies for the LDS Church History Library, sent it to business executives and friends, and gave dozens of copies away as Christmas gifts.[27]

The Politician became a lightning rod of criticism the moment its pages first leaked to the public in 1958. The Birch founder noted that Eisenhower, the popular five-star general–turned president, was "a dedicated, conscious agent of the communist conspiracy." He further alleged that members of his cabinet were also communists, namely, John Foster Dulles, the secretary of state, Alan Dulles, the CIA director, and Milton Eisenhower, the president's brother, who served as an important adviser. Most astonishing, Welch argued that "Eisenhower and his Communist bosses and their pro-Communist appointees [were] gradually taking over" the United State government, doing

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so "right under the noses of the American people." In 1962 the Birch founder fearlessly claimed that the United States was "50–70 percent under Communist control."[28]

Just as important, Welch lambasted President Eisenhower for his "role in connection with the segregation storm in the South," alleging in *The Politician* that the president had promoted violence in the region to appease "Communist bosses who planned the whole thing far in advance." Welch specifically contended that

> the whole "civil rights" program and slogan in America today were just as phony as were the "agrarian reform" program and slogan of the Communists in China twenty years ago; and that they were being used by the same people, in the same way, for exactly the same purpose—of creating little flames of civil disorder which could be fanned and coalesced into the huge conflagration of civil war.[29]

He continued:

> The real "activists" and inciters on both sides of the issue don't care anymore about actual Negro "rights" than they do about growing mushrooms on the moon. What they want is the bitterness, strife, and the results of that strife—such as the acceptance of the use of federal troops to put down local "rebellion"—which can be brought about by urging both sides to resistance and violence.[30]

A number of racial incidences in the early 1960s concerned Welch. He decried the federal government's use of force to quell racial unrest with Freedom Riders, who tested court orders that barred segregation in interstate transportation. Similarly, he complained when President Kennedy called in federal troops to ensure that a black man could gain admittance into the University of Mississippi, an all-white school.[31]

Most problematic, however, were the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1964. Welch theorized that President Eisenhower and his successors—John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson—were unwitting communist dupes who supported civil rights legislation.[32] The Birch founder articulated these ideas most lucidly in *The Politician* but also in the 1963 issue of the *Birch Bulletin*, just as a civil rights bill was working its way through Congress. This bill, which Welch admonished his followers to reject, would eliminate the last vestiges of discrimination in public accommodations and give all Americans, according to President Kennedy, "the right to be served in facilities which are open to the public."[33] Importantly, the Birch leader warned that civil rights legislation would enlarge the powers of the federal government, hastening the creation of a communist state. By instituting new federal agencies to oversee civil rights and by dispatching federal law enforcement

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to enforce its provisions, Welch claimed that communist schemers had designed the legislation to gobble up the powers of the state.[34]

The voluble Birch leader found proof of a civil rights conspiracy in the writings of an obscure communist named Joseph Pogany, who wrote under the alias of John Pepper. In Pepper's creative little pamphlet entitled "American Negro Problems," published in 1928, he claimed that the Communist Party in the United States used "white oppression of the Negro masses" as "part of the proletarian revolution in America against capitalism." Pepper further asserted that communists wanted to establish a "Negro Soviet Republic," in which they would achieve these ends through violence and racial strife.[35]

Welch also read the work of communists James W. Ford and James S. Allen, who echoed Pepper's claims. In the "The Negroes in a Soviet America," published in 1935, the authors laid out a carefully crafted plan for a Soviet-backed black republic in the United States. "When the proper time comes," they insisted, "the Communists may either help the Negroes to set up their own Negro Soviet Republic in the Southeast, before the whole United States has been Sovietized; or that the Communist-led Negroes might first help to establish a Soviet central government over the whole United States." The Birch founder read these pamphlets with great zeal and became convinced that the authors' background as members of the Communist Party had given them a unique insight into "the [Kremlin's] plans to establish a Negro Soviet Republic" in the United States.[36]

For Welch, the communists' master plan unfolded in the early 1960s when racial unrest gripped the country. These events provided clear proof that Pepper, Ford, and Allen had accurately predicted communist aims and strategies. Accordingly Welch, like Hoover, went to great lengths to besmirch Martin Luther King, whom the Birch founder claimed belonged to "sixty Communist-front organizations—more than any other Communist in the United States." In the 1963 *Birch Bulletin*, for example, he published a 1957 picture of King at the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, a school that the Tennessee legislature abolished for "being a subversive organization."[37] Welch asserted that communists ran the school, claiming that the institution's purpose was to bring "tension, disturbance, strife and violence in their advancement of the Communist doctrine of 'racial nationalism.'"[38]

For Birchers and racist southerners, the Highlander School fit the communist profile perfectly. Organized in the 1930s to promote racial equality, its leaders fought discrimination and segregation and supported civil rights legislation. But at the same time scholars have emphatically denied Bircher claims that the Highlander School was something other than what it purported to be: a training center for social justice leadership. Indeed, there is

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no evidence the Highlander School was led by communists, frequented by communists, or supported by communists, despite being labeled "subversive" by Tennessee legislators and other misguided and agenda-driven segregationists.[39]

Ezra Taft Benson, who had limited exposure to black people growing up in a small, almost entirely white Mormon farming community in Whitney, Idaho, embraced Welch's anti–civil rights agenda uncritically.[40] What is more, the apostle spent much of the 1960s promoting the Birch agenda. A flashpoint occurred in September 1963 when he spoke at a gathering of more than two thousand Birch supporters at the Society's five-year anniversary in Los Angeles. Benson grimly noted that he was not there "to tickle your ears" or "to entertain you. The message I bring is not a happy one." "For thirty years we have aided the cause of the atheistic-socialist conspiracy by permitting socialists, communists, and fellow-travelers in high places in government." Additionally, he decried "the insidious infiltration of socialistic communist agents and sympathizers into almost every segment of American life."[41]

This address marked the first time Benson implied publicly that President Eisenhower allowed communists into the highest echelons of government—and that the president himself was possibly a communist agent. This highly inflammatory address made national headlines when Idaho Congressman Ralph Harding, a fellow Latter-day Saint, "loosed a bitter attack on Ezra Taft Benson on the floor of the House."[42] Harding assailed the apostle for accepting Welch's claim that Eisenhower was a communist and for linking the Birch Society with the LDS church. The speech made it into the *Congressional Record*; the *New York Times* and the *Associated Press* also reported the story.[43]

The unfavorable publicity generated by the Harding affair prompted the First Presidency to call Benson on a mission to Frankfurt, Germany, where they hoped he would tone down his extreme partisanship.[44] But the feisty apostle did not leave quietly. In the weeks leading up to his departure on New Year's Day, 1964, he condemned the civil rights movement. Benson's public denunciation of civil rights marked a sharp contrast with the church, which by the mid-1960s was moving toward a more moderate position with civil rights. In the October 1963 session of general conference, First Presidency counselor Hugh B. Brown, an adamant supporter of racial equality and a vocal critic of the priesthood and temple ban, read a statement in conference expressing support for civil rights, which was a hotly debated issue that fall as civil rights legislation worked its way through Congress.[45] "We would like it to be known," Brown averred, "that there is in this Church no doctrine, belief, or practice, that is intended to deny the enjoyment of full civil rights by any person regardless of race, color, or creed."[46]

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Although Brown explained that his statement was not an endorsement of "any stand on any bill,"[47] it came at a propitious time. NAACP officials, who had threatened to protest at the October conference, criticized the church for the state's inaction on civil rights.[48] Nevertheless, the NAACP's sharp criticisms did not temper Benson or bridle his tongue. About two weeks after Brown's general conference address, the apostle told a church gathering in New Orleans that the "federal government should not have sent troops to Little Rock, [Arkansas], and Oxford, Mississippi, in the school integration crisis." Echoing a Birch line, Benson condemned the "integration controversy," asserting that the civil rights movement had "been agitated by radicals" who were "part of the Communist-socialist conspiracy."[49] Furthermore, Benson delivered three hard-hitting speeches in December 1963 to Mormon audiences in Utah and Idaho, claiming that the civil rights movement was part of a "pattern for the Communist takeover of America."[50]

Ironically, Benson's views on civil rights were more in line with Birchers, fundamentalist Christian preachers, and segregationist Dixiecrats than members of his own political party, virtually all of whom rejected the notion that the civil rights movement was tied to communism.[51] Beyond the obvious Birch connection, Benson also sympathized with the Rev. Billy Hargis and the Rev. Bob Jones, two fiery and combative southern ministers who proclaimed that the NAACP was a communist plot. Benson, in fact, spoke at rallies with Hargis and had one of his addresses published in the *Christian Crusade*, Hargis's colorful monthly magazine.[52] The Mormon apostle also sympathized with segregationist Dixiecrats, especially South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond, Mississippi Senator James Eastland, and Alabama Governor George Wallace, who famously declared that "the Civil Rights Act of 1964 came straight out of the *Communist Manifesto*."[53] Benson, "favorably impressed" with the governor, considered running with him on a third-party presidential ticket. Before Wallace, the apostle considered a presidential run with Strom Thurmond.[54]

But these fringe figures were not the only influence on Benson. The Mormon apostle had much in common with the conservative wing of the Republican Party. Even though the moderates of the party—Nelson Rockefeller, George Romney, Richard Nixon, and Everett Dirksen—supported civil rights, the right-wing of the party did not.[55] Outspoken Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, the party's nominee in the 1964 presidential election, opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as did controversial South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond, up-and-coming political newcomer Ronald Reagan, and prominent conservative pundit William F. Buckley Jr., founding editor of the influential *National Review* magazine. These rock-ribbed conservatives believed that racial equality should

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be voluntary, not compulsory. Added to that, they opposed racial equality on federal principles, citing that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 would enlarge the power of the federal government at the expense of the states.[56] This line of reasoning resonated with Benson. It was consistent with his deep commitment to personal choice but also to states' rights. "I am convinced," he emphatically stated, that the "pending 'civil rights' legislation is . . . about 10% civil rights and about 90% a further extension of socialistic Federal Controls."[57]

Meanwhile, as the apostle denounced civil rights, he disseminated his speeches on official church letterhead.[58] This prompted a sharp response from Utah Senator Frank Moss, a Democrat and practicing Latter-day Saint, who complained that Benson's office had tried to imply institutional support for the apostle's extreme right-wing views. "Apparently whoever is doing this work has mailed copies to all of the people who appear in the Utah Directory in Washington, D.C.," the Senator fumed to First Presidency counselor Hugh B. Brown after receiving one of Benson's speeches.[59]

Benson's Birch support continued unabated while he presided over the European mission in Frankfurt, Germany, where he lived from January 1, 1964 to September 14, 1965. His mission presidency had not quieted his conspiratorial views, nor his willingness to express them publicly. In the April 1965 session of general conference, some nine months after President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law, Benson delivered another stinging sermon that again drew the ire of the First Presidency. He criticized the civil rights movement, the welfare state, federal aid to education, and labor unions, proclaiming that all were tied to communism. "Before I left for Europe I warned how the communists were using the Civil Rights movement to promote eventual take-over of this country," Benson asserted. "When are we going to wake up? What do you know about the dangerous Civil Rights Agitation in Mississippi? Do you fear the destruction of all vestiges of state government?"[60]

Ernest Wilkinson, Benson's confidante and fellow archconservative, speculated that the "Brethren may have thought [Benson's address] was untactful," adding, "it is apparent that Ezra is not going to give up the cause in which he knows he is right."[61] The First Presidency responded by striking from the record the civil rights portion of the speech, primarily at Hugh Brown's insistence, who candidly explained to the First Presidency "that he had had many unfavorable reactions regarding Brother Benson's remarks." Brown and other senior apostles were upset at the news coverage of the address, in particular Benson's statement on civil rights, which offered a stark counterpoint to Brown's.[62] Indeed, reporters observed that the two men had "sharp and bitter differences . . . on civil rights." They were right. When asked by a

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reporter whose position on civil rights was correct, Brown "tartly said that Benson 'speaks strictly for himself.' My statement is the official Church position."[63]

The timing of Benson's anti–civil rights sermon was also unfortunate. It came during a contentious legislative session when Utah lawmakers debated whether or not to pass a bill that would outlaw discrimination in public spaces.[64] Frustrated that the church would not support the bill, NAACP activists gathered around Temple Square just days before general conference to protest LDS racial teachings.[65] NAACP president Johnie Driver, the church's most vocal critic, bluntly explained that blacks could not get decent housing or adequate employment in Utah "because of the official L.D.S. Church doctrine of exclusion of Negroes from the priesthood."[66] Driver "asked Church leaders to use their influence to support fair housing and employment in Utah." Church leaders, however, balked. They reasoned that issues like employment and housing were not moral issues and therefore preferred to remain silent.[67]

Benson promptly returned to Germany after his controversial general conference address, where he maintained a vigorous correspondence with Robert Welch.[68] Welch sent him literature that he read voraciously, marking up important passages in red ink.[69] Welch's pamphlet "Two Revolutions at Once" particularly impressed him. Benson underlined nearly every passage, paying close attention to the paragraphs that discussed how "the Communists" would "create bitterness, turmoil, civil disorders" to promote a "civil war" in the country and usher in a "Negro Soviet Republic."[70] He also praised Welch's short essay entitled "What's Wrong with Civil Rights," calling it "excellent." But Benson's favorite reading was the August 1965 *Birch Bulletin*, which he described as "one of the best." He requested "five free copies" to share with his Mormon friends and he effusively praised Welch for his good work.[71]

The August 1965 *Birch Bulletin* struck at the heart of the Birch message: "Fully expose the 'civil rights' fraud and you will break the back of the Communist Conspiracy."[72] Benson heeded the counsel. His sense of urgency to fight civil rights increased during the summer of 1965, as his time in Germany was winding down. A number of factors alarmed him. First, in July 1965 the NAACP passed a unanimous resolution asking various countries "to refuse to grant visas to missionaries and representatives" of the church until LDS officials changed their "doctrine of non-white inferiority" and adopted "a positive policy of support for civil rights."[73] Second, President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law in August 1965, which Benson feared would lead to a Leviathan state. Third, the August 1965 Watts Riots further alarmed him. The riot, which destroyed millions of dollars in property damage and killed thirty-four people, prompted Benson and the Birchers to see

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the destruction and lawlessness in south central Los Angeles as the opening salvo of the communist revolution.[74]

The apostle asserted that communists "had spent two years in Watts agitating for the uprising."[75] His son Reed concurred, claiming that the racial strife in Los Angeles and the push for racial equality in Utah was ample proof that the "Communist influence" was "growing." Reed was not an impartial observer. He had been serving as regional coordinator for the John Birch Society in Utah since 1962.[76] He responded to the Watts rioting and to Hugh B. Brown's civil rights statement by dispatching a memo in September 1965 to the "Utah Chapters" of the Birch Society. There he instructed members to "begin a whispering campaign and foster rumors that the Civil Rights groups are going to organize demonstrations in Salt Lake City in connection with the forthcoming LDS conference. It will appear logical that such demonstrations are to be made," he averred, "because of the undercurrent of feelings being generated both in and out of the LDS church to champion the cause of Civil Rights." Reed reasoned that a "few well-placed comments will soon mushroom out of control and before the conference begins there will be such a feeling of unrest and distrust that the populace will hardly know who to believe. The news media will play it to the very hilt. No matter what the Civil Rights leaders may try to say to deny it the seed will have been down and again the Civil Rights movement will suffer a telling blow."[77]

The memo was gutsy. It could expose his father to further criticism or it could mobilize opposition against civil rights. Reed's support of the Birch line was already well-known. He had publicly denounced President Eisenhower and President Johnson as communists and had accused "Martin Luther King of hurting the cause of the Negro."[78] Likewise, he assailed the NAACP as a "communist front" group, lamenting that Mormons had joined.[79]

In this highly charged atmosphere, Ezra Taft Benson returned to Utah on September 14, 1965.[80] The apostle came home amid widespread paranoia that black militants would disrupt general conference—a claim that the NAACP emphatically denied—and amid a heightened state of alert from the Utah National Guard.[81]

There is no evidence that Ezra Taft Benson knew about Reed's memo.[82] But at the same time, Reed would not have acted without his father's approval. The two were extremely close. His father urged him to take the job at the Birch Society; moreover, the two were confidantes and committed foes of racial equality.[83] For his part, the elder Benson stayed away from the limelight during the fall of 1965, given the past dust-up from the April 1965 General Conference and the current unrest generated by his son's memo. In private, however, he continued to assail Dr. King. Benson explained to

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his colleagues in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles that "we are . . . seeing something being carried out today that was planned by the highest councils of the communist party twenty years ago, and that Martin Luther King is an agent if not a power in the communist party." He further stated that the civil rights movement "is being directed and supported and prompted by agents of the communist party, that the negroes are being used in this whole question of civil rights, integration, etc., and that the NAACP are largely made up of men who are affiliated with . . . one of the communist-front organizations."[84]

The NAACP, meanwhile, grew weary of the "smear tactics" by "Benson and the Birchers." In a 1966 newsletter of the Utah chapter of the NAACP, the writer assailed Robert Welch and Ezra Taft Benson for sponsoring "slides and films trying to link civil rights to communism." Benson, in particular, posed a difficult challenge for the NAACP. His authoritative position as an LDS apostle, coupled with his service in the Eisenhower administration, made him a formidable foe. He not only opposed racial equality, the newsletter bitterly complained, but he actively "smeared" civil rights "in Louisiana . . . and more recently in the Assembly Hall on Temple Square."[85]

From 1966 to 1968 Benson intensified his anti–civil rights stance. The rise of the black power movement particularly frightened him, especially black militants, who couched their rhetoric in violence.[86] Moreover, Benson ignored the mounting pressure against the church to support better jobs and housing for blacks and to lift the priesthood and temple ban.[87] Concurrently, he explored running for the presidency with two ardent segregationists—Strom Thurmond and George Wallace—seemingly oblivious to critics, both within and outside the church, who publicly questioned Mormon racial teachings.[88]

The apostle's opposition to racial equality reached a climax in the fall of 1966 when he attacked King publicly, the first time he had done so. At a devotional assembly at BYU, he excoriated the civil rights leader for lecturing "at a communist training school," soliciting "funds through communist sources," hiring "a communist as a top-level aide," affiliating "with communist fronts," and someone who is "praised in the communist press" and "who unquestionably parallels the communist line." The civil rights leader, Benson continued, "advocates the breaking of the law" and has been described by J. Edgar Hoover as 'the most notorious liar in the country.'"[89] The speech ignited a firestorm on campus. Students debated each other in the student newspaper, questioning whether or not King was a communist. Some agreed with Benson, some rejected the notion, while others remained confused.[90] A BYU professor, angry about the address, limned a one-page letter to Dr. King asking what he could do to confront "such ridiculous charges" linking "questions of Communist involvement with the Civil Rights movement."[91]

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Another BYU professor expressed dissatisfaction to Hugh Brown, characterizing Benson's address "to the B.Y.U. student body" as "the most extreme yet." The professor asked if members "of the Quorum of the Twelve have unlimited freedom to present personal biases and prejudices in public assemblies?"[92]

Benson continued his attack on racial equality in the months ahead. Against increasing racial unrest in the United States, and against rumors that armed "Negroes with machine guns and bombs were . . . coming to Salt Lake City" to harm the church,[93] Benson sought the permission of LDS church president David O. McKay to address civil rights at the October 1967 session of General Conference. The aging president consented, not knowing the specifics of Benson's sermon.[94] Benson's "Trust Not the Arm of Flesh" was a devastating indictment of the civil rights movement. Drawing on Robert Welch and J. Edgar Hoover,[95] the apostle criticized black radicals for creating "a Communist program for revolution in America."[96] He explained that the strategy for a communist revolution was three-fold. First, communists would "create hatred." They would "use means to agitate blacks into hating whites and whites into hating blacks" and "play up and exaggerate real grievances," even to the point of manufacturing "false stories and rumors of injustices and brutality." Second, they would "trigger violence." They would "form large mobs."[97] And third, they would seek to "overthrow established government. Once mob violence becomes widespread and commonplace, [communists] would condition those who are emotionally involved to accept violence as the only way to 'settle the score.'" Communists would then "provide leadership and training for guerilla warfare." They would gradually test their training "through sporadic riots and battles with police," then, "at the appointed time, launch an all-out simultaneous offensive in every major city."[98]

Most astonishing, Benson claimed that black radicals would "sabotage . . . water supplies, power grids, main rail road [lines] and highway arteries, communication centers, and government buildings. With fires raging in every . . . part of town, with wanton looting going on in the darkness of a big city without routine police protection, without water to drink, without electrical refrigeration, without transportation or radio or TV, the public will panic, lock its doors in trembling fear, and make it that much easier for the small but assembled and fully disciplined guerrilla bands to capture the power centers of each community." Further, Benson warned, the riots would lead to "more government housing, government welfare, government job training" and "federal control over the police." In short, the civil rights movement was leading to full-blown communism.[99]

The speech was the most comprehensive statement to date of any Mormon leader on the subject of civil rights.[100] Proud of his father's work, Reed sent a

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copy of the address to Robert Welch. "I thought you might be interested in the approach to, and discussion of, the so-called Civil Rights movement, as my father presented it to our members," Reed explained enthusiastically.[101] Deseret Book, the church-owned and -operated bookstore, published the address the following year as a pamphlet entitled *Civil Rights: A Tool of Communist Deception*. In 1969 it was reprinted in a collection of Benson's sermons entitled *An Enemy Hath Done This*, compiled by Jerreld Newquist, a Mormon Bircher. Neither of Benson's authorized biographies discuss this controversial address.[102]

Benson's speech struck a chord with certain members of the Quorum of the Twelve, especially with apostle Mark Petersen, who also condemned black militants. In a February 1968 address at BYU, he decried the "many vicious elements in this country," theorizing that "they would destroy us if they could." "We're on the verge of another civil war," he explained, echoing Benson. He implored BYU students and faculty to consider "what some of these agitators are now saying in calling upon one great element of the population to arm itself and shoot down the white people because we are not giving them all they think they ought to have."[103] BYU president Ernest Wilkinson was "thrilled at the address." He "could not help think that if Ezra Taft Benson," his close friend, "had given that talk there would have been no end of criticism of him on our campus." Petersen "openly said that it was a fight between the races," but because he did not have the "public image of . . . Benson" there would be "no criticism."[104]

The following spring Benson continued his crusade against the civil rights movement when Martin Luther King was assassinated. Fearful that Americans would make a martyr over the fallen leader, the apostle protested President Lyndon Johnson's executive order to lower flags at half-mast. In April 1968, he sent a memo to the Quorum of the Twelve and First Presidency declaring that "Communists will use Mr. King's death for as much yardage as possible." Much to Hugh Brown's dismay, Benson vilified King as a communist, a liar, and a disreputable person who employed top-level aids as communists.[105]

Also that month Benson wrote a letter to the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, again criticizing King and condemning the civil rights movement. Provocatively titled "Dangers Ahead," the letter represented Benson's growing frustration with the movement, his fear of black militants, and the alarming danger that the communist conspiracy was now in its final stages. Benson did not hold back. He predicted that black Marxists would take to the streets and usher in a revolution, collapse America's financial institutions, and plunge the nation into a "prolonged recession or depression." In language

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infused with apocalyptic overtones, he ominously noted that black Marxists would lead to the "possible outbreak of World War III."[106]

In May 1968, about a month after he addressed the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, Benson continued his attack on civil rights—this time in another devotional address at BYU. Laced with Birch themes, he condemned secret plottings by black-power advocates, decried "black Marxists" "for burning down America," and excoriated presidential candidates for "buying off those burning . . . cities with more of the federal subsidies."[107]

Benson's warnings were bold, even audacious. They came at a time when the church was under intense scrutiny for its racial teachings. There were rumors that armed black militants would bomb Temple Square during the April 1970 session of General Conference—the third time in five years that such rumors surfaced. "It has come to my attention that some of the less responsible of the Black element may try to disrupt sessions of General Conference," a concerned church member explained to First Presidency counselor Harold B. Lee. Alarmed, church officials held prayer sessions, conducted evacuation exercises, and placed security guards at the entrance of church headquarters.[108]

This daunting threat occurred at the same time the church was already under siege when scores of universities protested BYU's racial policies from 1968 to 1971.[109] Universities refused to play BYU sports teams. Dozens of newspapers and magazines covered the protests.[110] The Western Athletic Conference commissioner and many of the conference schools' presidents discussed "sever[ing] all relations" with BYU until its "discriminatory" policies "are eliminated."[111] Compounding matters further, in the 1960s BYU did not recruit black athletes or black students. There were only three African Americans at BYU in 1968, suggesting to conference officials that black people were neither welcomed nor supported at the church institution.[112] Equally difficult, civil rights investigators from the Department of Health and Human Welfare began exploring whether or not BYU had violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.[113] In addition, critics attacked the Book of Mormon for its alleged racist scriptures.[114]

As before, Benson brushed off the criticism. He felt "no compunction to make the Church popular with liberals, Socialists, or Communists."[115] With Cleon Skousen, his close friend, the apostle opined that the protests were motivated by communists. "Communist-oriented revolutionary groups have been spearheading the wave of protests and violence directed toward Brigham Young University and the Mormon Church," Skousen sneered, quoting Benson's 1967 conference address. What they wanted was to "create resentment and hatred between the races."[116] Benson agreed with Skousen's assessment

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but he went further, targeting Latter-day Saints, specifically "apostates," whom he assailed for attacking "the church for not being in the forefront of the so-called civil rights movement."[117]

As the BYU protests showed no signs of abating, the apostles decided to meet to discuss ways to burnish the church's "dwindling public image."[118] The meeting took place in New York in February 1970. The apostles convened to discuss "what steps we should take in the direction of public relations to help combat some of the unfavorable publicity that we have been having." They met for two and half hours at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in midtown New York City. Apostles Harold B. Lee, Spencer W. Kimball, Gordon B. Hinckley, Richard L. Evans, and Ezra Taft Benson attended. J. Willard Marriott and other prominent LDS businessmen from the East also attended the meeting. The group concluded that because "newspapers and other news media seem to be making light and picking on us" that "we should develop a very strong, positive position and program and feed the news media with successful stories."[119]

In the midst of all this, church leaders confronted Benson. They warned him that he was harming the church. Indeed, there is no record of Benson discussing civil rights after the BYU protests ended in 1971. Also important, David O. McKay allowed him to preach his antiblack views, but his successors in the church presidency—Joseph Fielding Smith, Harold B. Lee, and Spencer W. Kimball—did not. After McKay died in 1970, these senior apostles instructed him not to discuss his conspiracy theories in public.[120] Kimball, in particular, reined-in Benson, chastising him on numerous occasions for publicly expressing his extreme right-wing views. The diminutive Mormon president promoted a vision of the church that clashed with Benson's Birch views. Far-sighted and visionary, Kimball embraced an ecumenical vision of Mormonism that expanded missionary work in communist and African nations.[121] More significantly, as church president, Kimball lifted the 126-year-old priesthood and temple ban in 1978.[122] Benson supported Kimball's revelation, but he did not talk about it publicly.[123] He understood the direction President Kimball wanted to take the church and he knew instinctively that he could no longer discuss his antiblack views in public.

Nonetheless, Benson's erstwhile teachings had consequences. When he became the church president in 1985, his Birch past reemerged unexpectedly. During the contentious debate over whether or not to name a federal holiday after Dr. King,[124] some ultraconservative Mormons appealed to Benson's earlier writings to oppose the holiday in Arizona. The matter turned personal when Benson's grandson Steve, a prize-winning cartoonist at the *Arizona Republic*, leaked some letters to an Arizona newspaper that reflected poorly

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on the church president. The letters, written by Mormons who harbored strong antiblack views, recalled then-apostle Benson's words that King "was a communist and a deceiver, which plainly put him into the category of the anti-Christ."[125]

Recognizing the potential fallout, the LDS public-relations department promptly issued a statement affirming Benson's love for all people regardless of "color, creed or political persuasion."[126] If the Arizona episode was troubling enough, the church also had to deal with the fallout from Utah's refusal to honor Martin Luther King Day, opting instead for the more generic Human Rights Day. Though the aging Mormon president, now in declining health, did not meet with members of the legislature to express opposition to the King holiday, he did not need to. His views about Dr. King were well known.[127]

In 2000, some six years after Benson died, the Utah state legislature renamed the holiday after Dr. King, in what was a *stunning* development considering Benson's public opposition to Dr. King and civil rights.[128] Gordon B. Hinckley promoted the change. As church president, he "lent his support" to rename the holiday after King, while at the same time befriending leaders of the NAACP and promoting LDS outreach in black neighborhoods and communities.[129] Equally significant, he counseled Latter-day Saints to avoid racial slurs and to welcome all people of color within their ranks.[130] Under Hinckley's energetic leadership, he made it clear to the rank-and-file that it was no longer acceptable to demean black people or to deny them basic rights and liberties. More than anyone else in church leadership, Hinckley sought to counteract Benson and usher in a new beginning for Mormon race relations.

Notes

My thanks to Newell G. Bringhurst and Stirling Adams for their insightful critique of this essay. Also, slight portions from the introduction and chapter 5 of this book are drawn from Matthew L. Harris's article "Ezra Taft Benson, Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Emergence of a Conspiracy Culture within the Mormon Church," *John Whitmer Historical Association Society Journal* 37, no. 1 (Spring–Summer 2017): 51–82. I am grateful to William Morain, the editor of the journal, for granting permission to use portions of this work.

1. Dr. King's proxy work was done in the Salt Lake City and Provo Temples in 1991 and 1992, respectively. This included his baptism, endowment, and sealing to his parents. Malcolm X's temple work was done at about the same time. Their "Ordinance Records" are located in the LDS Family History Center, Salt Lake City, Utah.

2. LDS church president Heber J. Grant candidly explained that because of the "penalty of a black skin and exclusion from the exercise of the rights of the priesthood . . . we do not encourage [blacks] to become members of the church." In Grant to L. H. Wilkin, January

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28, 1928, in Lester Bush, ed., "Compilation of the Negro in Mormonism" (unpublished compilation, 1972), 228–29, LDS Church History Library; and Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), 477, who explained that the church did not proselytize in black communities, but if worthy blacks requested baptism, missionaries would grant it.

3. Two LDS apostles offered the most vivid expressions of Mormon racial teachings: Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection: Short Discourses on Gospel Themes*, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1945), chaps. 15–16; and McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 102–3, 107–8, 476–77, 553–54. See also Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), chaps. 2, 8.

4. Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringhurst, eds., *The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 67–83, 109–12. Newell G. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People Within Mormonism* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), chap. 9; Lester E. Bush Jr. and Armand L. Mauss, eds., *Neither White nor Black: Mormon Scholars Confront the Race Issue in a Universal Church* (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1984), 9–30, 86–97. For Benson's depiction of blacks as the "seed of Cain," see "Trust Not the Arm of Flesh," *Improvement Era* 70 (December 1967): 55.

5. FBI background check on Ezra Taft Benson, November 28, 1952, Ezra Taft Benson File (77-54679-21), Federal Bureau of Investigation Files and Records (Freedom of Information Act), Washington, D.C.

6. Ezra Taft Benson, *An Enemy Hath Done This*, compiled by Jerreld L. Newquist (Salt Lake City: Parliament Publishers, 1969), 65.

7. Ezra Taft Benson to J. Edgar Hoover, May 28, 1965, Ezra Taft Benson File (62-104401), Federal Bureau of Investigation Files and Records (Freedom of Information Act), Washington, D.C.

8. For these points, see Matthew L. Harris, "*Watchman on the Tower": Ezra Taft Benson and the Emergence of the Mormon Right* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, forthcoming, 2019).

9. Ezra Taft Benson, *Title of Liberty: A Warning Voice*, compiled by Mark A. Benson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964), 83. See also Benson to Hugh B. Brown, September 18, 1962, Box 3, Folder 4, Hugh B. Brown Research Files, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

10. J. Edgar Hoover, *Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism in America and How to Fight It* (New York: Hold, Rinehart, and Winston, 1958), 246. For a trenchant analysis of *Masters of Deceit*, see Richard Gid Powers, *Not Without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998), 281–82.

11. Hoover, *Masters of Deceit*, 249.

12. J. Edgar Hoover, *A Study of Communism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1962), 170. See also J. Edgar Hoover, *On Communism* (New York: Random House, 1969), part 2.

13. *Senate Committee on Commerce, 88th Congress, Civil Rights—Public Accommodations* (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1963), 68; Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–63 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 564.*

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14. David J. Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Penguin, 1981), chaps. 1–2, remains the best account of Hoover's wiretapping activities. Also useful is Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 568–69; Randall B. Woods, *Prisoners of Hope: Lyndon B. Johnson, the Great Society, and the Limits of Liberalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 161–64; Curt Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 502–29; and Kenneth O'Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960–1972* (New York: Free Press, 1989), chap. 4.

15. Garrow, *FBI and Martin Luther King*, 71.

16. King, "Playboy Interview" (1965), in James M. Washington, ed., *The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper One, 1986), 362.

17. Garrow, *FBI and Martin Luther King* makes this point. See also his article, "The FBI and Martin Luther King," *The Atlantic* (July–August 2002): http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2002/07/the-fbi-and-martin-luther-king/302537/. Woods, *Prisoners of Hope*, 306, writes that "Hoover and others . . . were determined to establish a link between the forces of internationalism and the civil rights movement."

18. The best treatment detailing Hoover's malfeasance, and his treatment of King, is Betty Medsger, *The Burglary: The Discovery of J. Edgar Hoover's Secret FBI* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2014). See also Tim Weiner, *Enemies: A History of the FBI* (New York: Random House, 2012), 271, 274.

19. Benson to President Richard Nixon, May 4, 1971, Ezra Taft Benson File (94-38023-66), Federal Bureau of Investigation Files and Records (Freedom of Information Act), Washington, D.C. See also Hoover's admiration for Benson's defense, in a letter to Benson dated May 11, 1971, ibid. As late as 1984, Benson continued to defend Hoover: "I knew Mr. Hoover personally. He was a God-fearing man, and one of the most honorable and able men I have known in government service." In Ezra Taft Benson, "God's Hand in Our Nation's History," Canyon Road Ward sermon, Salt Lake City, Ensign Stake, December 30, 1984, Box 45, folder 10, Duane E. Jeffery Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

20. Three seminal accounts of the Birch Society include D. J. Mulloy, *The World of the John Birch Society: Conspiracy, Conservatism, and the Cold War* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 2014); Daniel Bell, ed., *The Radical Right: The New American Right*, expanded and updated (New York: Doubleday, 1963), chap. 11; and Jonathan M. Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), chap. 3. For a broader discussion about conspiracy in post–World War II America, see Robert Alan Goldberg, *Enemies Within: The Culture of Conspiracy in Modern America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001).

21. Ezra Taft Benson to Robert Welch, May 17, 1965, January 10, 1969, both in Ezra Taft Benson Correspondence, John Birch Society Headquarters, Appleton, Wisc. See also Benson to David O. McKay, April 19, 1967, Box 65, Folder 1, David O. McKay Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, extolling Welch as "a great American, a true patriot, and a devoted worker for freedom." For Welch's assessment of Benson, see the "Introductory Remarks" he gave at a speech in Salt Lake, April 7, 1966, Box 2, Folder 3, Hugh B. Brown Research Files.

22. For McKay's rebuff of Benson joining JBS and sitting on its board, see McKay journal, August 9, 1963 (Box 54, Folder 1) and March 5, 1964 (Box 56, Folder 2), David O. McKay Papers.

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23. Benson, quoted in "Benson Clarifies Views on Birch Society," *Salt Lake Tribune*, March 21, 1963; see also Benson to David O. McKay, March 25, 1966, Box 62, Folder 2, David O. McKay Papers; and Benson, "The Christ," *American Opinion* 7 (December 1964): 44, where he calls the Birch Society "valiant patriots," who are "courageously acting to bring about 'less government, more individual responsibility and a better world.'"

24. Benson to Welch, November 17, 1967, and Welch's reply politely declining the offer, November 22, 1967, both in Ezra Taft Benson Correspondence, JBS Headquarters.

25. For Benson's assertion that Eisenhower "gave help to the conspiracy," and for his initial reading of *The Politician* in 1961, see Benson to Hoover, May 28, 1965, Ezra Taft Benson File (62-104401).

26. Benson informed senior church official Joseph Fielding Smith that he first read *The Politician* in 1961 in galley form some two years before it was published in 1963. Benson to Smith, July 31, 1963, MSS SC 1260, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Library, Brigham Young University. Also in Box 11, Joseph Fielding Smith Papers, LDS Church History Library. The David O. McKay papers indicate that he sent this letter to each of the apostles.

27. Benson to Hoover, June 15, 1965, Ezra Taft Benson File (94-38023-5), Federal Bureau of Investigation Files and Records (Freedom of Information Act), Washington, D.C. The Benson-Welch papers at the John Birch Society Headquarters in Appleton, Wisconsin, contain receipts and acknowledgements of copies of *The Politician* that Benson ordered.

28. *The Politician* (1958 unpublished manuscript in Matt Harris's files), 267; *The Politician* (Belmont, Mass.: Belmont Publishing, 1964), 221–28, 249. Welch made the initial claim that Eisenhower was a communist in a 1958 unpublished manuscript he circulated among friends. The manuscript, which comprised 302 pages, was eventually titled *The Politician*. When journalists got a hold of it in 1960, they criticized him sharply for his controversial views about Eisenhower. When *The Politician* was officially published in 1963, Welch omitted some of his most controversial claims, including the line that Eisenhower was "a dedicated, conscious agent of the Communist conspiracy." Nevertheless, subsequent editions of *The Politician* affirm Welch's belief that Eisenhower was an unwitting agent of the Communist cause. See *The Politician*, rev. ed. (Appleton, Wisc.: Robert Welch University Press, 2002). Mulloy, *World of the John Birch Society*, 16–22, provides a succinct overview of the evolution of *The Politician* as well as attacks on it. See also David H. Bennett, *The Party of Fear: The American Far Right from Nativism to the Militia Movement*, revised and updated (New York: Vintage, 1995), 318–19.

29. Welch, *The Politician* (1958), 267.

30. Ibid., 267–68. See also Robert Welch, *The Blue Book* (Appleton, Wisc.: Western Islands, orig. pub. 1959; reprint, 1999), 192–93.

31. Mulloy, *World of the John Birch Society*, 117–24. See also Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), 73–96; Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917–1963* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2004), 515–16, 594; Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954–1992*, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 114–15, 129–30.

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32. I explore this theme in greater detail in "Ezra Taft Benson, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and the Emergence of a Conspiracy Culture within the Mormon Church," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 37 (Spring/Summer 2017): 59, 70–71.

33. Kennedy "Address on Civil Rights" (June 11, 1963), transcript at the Miller Center, University of Virginia, http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/speech-3375. Welch instructed his followers to "oppose the whole 'civil rights' program" of the Kennedy administration. *Birch Bulletin* (September 1963): 81.

34. Welch's anti–civil rights views are well known in *The Politician*, the *Birch Bulletin*, and the *American Opinion* magazine, but see in particular Welch, *A Letter to the South: On Segregation* (Belmont, Mass.: American Opinion, 1956; 1964); Welch, *To the Negroes of America* (Belmont, Mass.: American Opinion, 1967). Also see Manning Johnson, *Color, Communism, and Common Sense* (Boston: The Alliance, 1958); and Alan Stang, *It's Very Simple: The True Story of Civil Rights* (Boston: Western Islands, 1965). Other influential writings include John Rousselot, "Civil Rights: Communist Betrayal of a Good Cause," *American Opinion* (February 1964): 1–11; Scott Stanley Jr., "Revolution: The Assault on Selma," *American Opinion* (May 1965): 1–9; Gary Allen, "Black Power," *American Opinion* (January 1967): 1–14. See also Benjamin R. Epstein and Arnold Foster, "The War Against Civil Rights," which vividly recounts the Birch Society's opposition to racial equality. In Epstein and Arnold, *Report on the John Birch Society, 1966* (New York: Vintage, 1966), chap. 2.

35. *Birch Bulletin* (September 1963): 70.

36. Ibid., 73–74.

37. *Birch Bulletin* (September 1963): 78. See also Rousselot, "Civil Rights: Communist Betrayal of a Good Cause," 5–6; and Stang, *It's Very Simple*, 103–4, 111–13, 134–35. The best study of the Highlander School is John M. Glen, *Highlander: No Ordinary School, 1932–1962* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988).

38. *Birch Bulletin* (September 1963): 78. Glen, *Highlander*, 181–82, details how an undercover photographer infiltrated a meeting at the school with the purpose of exposing it as a communist front group.

39. See, for example, Glen, *Highlander*, chap. 9; Garrow, *FBI and Martin Luther King*, 24–25, 63; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 853–54.

40. The apostle was born and raised in Whitney, Idaho, in a small, predominantly white Mormon farming community named after LDS apostle Orson F. Whitney. In 1899, the year before Benson was born, the state only had 293 African Americans. By 1940 less than 1 percent of the population in Idaho were African Americans, which limited the apostle's exposure to black people. Arguably, the earliest contact Benson had with African Americans occurred in 1939 when he accepted a position in Washington, D.C., as the Executive Secretary of the National Council of Farm Cooperatives. There he lived among black people in the nation's capital. For Idaho census figures on African Americans, consult Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West*, 1528–1990 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 135, 253. For Benson living among the "colored" population in Washington, D.C., see Benson to David O. McKay, January 17, 1961, reel 7, Ezra Taft Benson Papers, LDS Church History Library.

41. Benson, *Title of Liberty*, 1, 5, 15.

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42. So characterized by BYU president Ernest Wilkinson, a close friend of Benson's. In Wilkinson journal, September 27, 1963, Box 101, Folder 3, Ernest Wilkinson Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

43. "Ezra Taft Benson's Support of the John Birch Society is Criticized," Proceedings and Debates of the 88th Congress, *Congressional Record* (September 25, 1963): 3–4. Jack Langguth, "Birch Society Aim Hailed by Benson: He Won't Rebut Eisenhower Denunciation by Welch," *New York Times*, September 23, 1963. "Benson Speaker at Testimonial Dinner," *Associated Press*, September 24, 1963. The *Washington Post* reported on the pre-coverage publicity of the event, "Benson to Speak at the John Birch Fete," September 20, 1963. For a succinct explanation of the Harding episode, consult Gregory A. Prince and Wm. Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), 296–302; D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 75. For Eisenhower's response to Benson's Birch address, see Harris, "Ezra Taft Benson, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and the Emergence of a Conspiracy Culture within the Mormon Church," 64–69.

44. Smith to Ralph Harding, October 30, 1963, Box 5, Folder 22, David John Buerger Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah; McKay to Harding, October 18, 1963, ibid. See also Wallace Turner, "Birch Dinner in Salt Lake City Vexes Mormons," *New York Times*, April 8, 1966.

45. Brown tried unsuccessfully to lift the ban in 1962, 1963, and 1969. He did not believe the ban was doctrinal. See Lowell L. Bennion conversation with Brown, February 12, 1962, as recounted by T. Edgar Lyon, scrap of notes, Box 26, Folder 1, T. Edgar Lyon Papers, LDS Church History Library; "'Saint for All Seasons': Interview with Lowell Bennion," *Sunstone* 10 (February 1985): 11; Lowell Bennion oral history with Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, March 9, 1985, LDS History Church Library; Brown to John F. Fitzgerald, March 13, 1962, Box 4, Folder 10, Special Collections, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University. In 1963, Brown told *New York Times* reporter Wallace Turner that "We are in the midst of a survey looking toward the possibility of admitting Negroes." In "Mormons Weigh Stand on Negro," *New York Times*, June 7, 1963; "Negro Issue is Considered by Mormons," *Chicago Tribune*, July 9, 1963; "Mormons Consider Move," *Wall Street Journal*, August 2, 1963. Charlie Brown, the First Presidency counselor's son, emphatically stated that his father had opposed the ban since the 1930s. In Charlie Brown oral history interview with Gregory A. Prince, June 6, 1995, Matt Harris files (courtesy of Greg Prince). See also Edwin B. Firmage, ed., *An Abundant Life: The Memoirs of Hugh B. Brown*, second ed., enlarged (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 142.

46. Brown General Conference address, October 4–6, 1963, in *Conference Report* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1963), 91; and Brown, "The Fight Between Good and Evil," *Improvement Era* 66 (December 1963): 1058.

47. Brown to John W. Fitzgerald, October 21, 1963, Box 4, Folder 10, John W. Fitzgerald Papers, Special Collections, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.

48. Even though the NAACP called off its protest at the 1963 General Conference, some NAACP members opined that Brown's statement "wasn't strong enough." Brown did not specifically endorse a public accommodations bill then circulating in the Utah legislature, which frustrated them. As recalled by NAACP member Danny Burnett, in

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Burnett oral history interview with Leslie G. Kelen, September 20, 1983, 45, Box 4, Folder 3, Interviews with African Americans in Utah, 1982–1988, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

49. "Benson, Graham Rip Wheat Sale," *Deseret News*, October 28, 1963. See also "Benson Says Black Is Red," *Daily Utah Chronicle* (University of Utah student newspaper), October 29, 1963. See also "Stake Conference Assignments," *Deseret News*, "Church News," October 19, 1963, p. 4.

50. "A Race Against Time" (December 10, 1963; BYU); "We Must Become Alerted and Informed" (December 13, 1963; Logan Tabernacle), "The Internal Threat Today" (December 19, 1963; Boise, Idaho), all in Benson, *Title of Liberty*, 22–41, 42–60, 61–85 (quote on 58).

51. Two exceptions are Republicans J. Edgar Hoover and Ronald Reagan, both of whom depicted racial unrest, urban violence, and black power as communist inspired. For this point, see Woods, *Prisoners of Hope*, 340. Most prominent Republicans rejected the civil rights–communism link and most eschewed the Birch Society. See David Farber, *The Rise and Fall of Modern American Conservatism: A Short History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), 70–75; Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 218–19, 222–23; Robert Alan Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 137–38; Carol T. Bogus, *Buckley: William F. Buckley, Jr. and the Rise of Modern Conservatism* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011), chap. 4; Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing*, 98–99.

52. For Hargis's conspiratorial views, see Lee Roy Chapman, "The Strange Love of Dr. Billy James Hargis," *This Land* 3 (November 1, 2012): http://thislandpress.com/2012/11/02/the-strange-love-of-dr-billy-james-hargis/; Bennett, *Party of Fear*, 328–31, 336. Hargis started the Christian Crusade Ministry in 1950 and published a monthly magazine of the same name. Benson published his "Trade and Treason" address in Hargis's magazine *Christian Crusade* 19 (April 1967): 22–24. The pair first met in 1962 when Benson spoke at Hargis's "Anti-Communist Leadership School," along with other anticommunists. For this point, see Powers, *Not Without Honor*, 279; and Hargis to Reed Benson, August 8, 1962, reel 2, Ezra Taft Benson Papers. In 1963 and again in 1967, Benson spoke at rallies with Hargis. See "Ezra Taft Benson Addresses Rally," *Deseret News*, January 7, 1963; Drew Pearson, "Ezra Taft Benson and the Birchers," *Madera Daily Tribune*, January 22, 1963; Hendrik Hertzberg and Michael Lerner, "'Rally for God and Country' Draws 1000 Conservatives, NAACP Pickets," *Harvard Crimson*, January 7, 1963; "This Week! 5 Great Nights of Christian Leadership Training: Christian Crusade Leadership School—Feb. 20–24," advertisement in the *Tulsa Daily World*, February 19, 1967.

53. Woods, *Prisoners of Hope*, 12–13; Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 217; George Lewis, "White South, Red Nation: Massive Resistance and the Cold War," in Clive Webb, *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 120–29.

54. Benson praised Wallace in a letter to Birch founder Robert Welch of March 8, 1968, Ezra Taft Benson Correspondence, JBS Headquarters. The apostle also characterized Wallace as "a good man." In "Benson Backs Wallace Stand," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 13, 1968. Wallace explained that his philosophy and "that of Mr. Benson are

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consistent and compatible." In Wallace to David O. McKay, February 12, 1968, Box 2, Folder 3, George C. Wallace Collection, Alabama Department of Archives and History. Citing Benson's "church responsibilities," McKay rebuffed Wallace's overture to have the Mormon apostle join the ticket. See McKay journal, September 9, 1968, Box 68, Folder 3, David O. McKay Papers; and Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 356.

55. Richard Norton Smith, *On His Own Terms: A Life of Nelson Rockefeller* (New York: Random House, 2014), xx–xxi; Clark R. Mollenhoff, *George Romney: Mormon in Politics* (New York: Meredith Press, 1968), 260–61; Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008), 126–27; Michael A. Cohen, *American Maelstrom: The 1968 Election and the Politics of Division* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 176–77, 186–87, 209; Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing*, 146–51.

56. Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 174–75, 218–19, 246; Joseph Crespino, *Strom Thurmond's America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 140–41, 170–76; Farber, *Rise and Fall,* 176, 183, 190–91; McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 123, 133, 140; Bogus, *Buckley*, chap. 3. Some of these conservatives were Benson's friends. Apostle Benson and Senator Goldwater, for example, enjoyed a close relationship and exchanged dozens of letters through the years. See Box 41, Folder 20, Ezra Taft Benson Papers; Box 2, Folder 7, Barry Goldwater Papers, Special Collections, Hayden Library, University of Arizona.

57. Benson, *Title of Liberty*, 58 (quote), 62, 76; Benson, *So Shall Ye Reap: Selected Addresses of Ezra Taft Benson*, compiled by Reed A. Benson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1960), 243–44. Reed Benson also echoed this line, as did Ernest Wilkinson, Benson's close friend. See "Reed Benson Speaks on Birchers; Upholds Civil Rights Battle," *Utah Daily Chronicle*, October 9, 1963; and Wilkinson journal, February 17–22, 1964, Box 101, Folder 4, Ernest L. Wilkinson Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

58. "A Race Against Time" (December 10, 1963; BYU); "We Must Become Alerted and Informed" (December 13, 1963; Logan Tabernacle), "The Internal Threat Today" (December 19, 1963; Boise, Idaho), all in Benson, *Title of Liberty*, 22–41, 42–60, 61–85. See also Benson, "Not Commanded in All Things," April 6, 1965, *Improvement Era* 68 (June 1965): 537–39.

59. Moss to Hugh B. Brown, February 19, 1964, Box 122, Folder 3, Frank E. Moss Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah. Moss also denounced Benson's extreme views on the floor of the U.S. Senate. "Politics of Extremism," Proceedings and Debates of the 89th Congress, *Congressional Record* (July 13, 1966): 5.

60. Ezra Taft Benson general conference address "Not Commanded in All Things," April 6, 1965, unaltered version, David O. McKay Scrapbook #79, David O. McKay Papers. Compare with the published version in *Improvement Era* 68 (June 1965): 537–39. Benson decried federal aid to education some six years earlier when he warned President Eisenhower to reject it. See Benson to Eisenhower, January 19, 1959, reel 6, Ezra Taft Benson Papers.

61. Wilkinson journal, April 6, 1965, Box 101, Folder 5, Ernest L. Wilkinson Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

62. First Presidency Minutes, April 23, 1965, Box 59, Folder 5, David O. McKay Papers. For McKay authorizing striking the civil rights portion of Benson's speech from the record,

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see First Presidency Minutes, May 3, 1965, ibid. For senior apostle Harold Lee's response to Benson's address, see his BYU devotional address "Be Not Deceived," *Speeches of the Year* (Provo, Utah: Extension Publications, Division of Continuing Education, Brigham Young University, 1965), 9.

63. "Benson Ties Rights Issue to Reds in Mormon Rift," *Washington Post*, April 13, 1965. See also "Mormon 'Fight' over Civil Rights," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 17, 1965. The *Deseret News*, the church-owned and -operated newspaper, did not discuss the conflict between Benson and Brown. See "Fight Red Influence Church Told," *Deseret News*, April 7, 1965. See also Hugh B. Brown to Sterling M. McMurrin, April 9, 1965, Box 290, Folder 3, Sterling M. McMurrin Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, wherein Brown notes that Benson was "still leading[ing] the attack in the opposite direction." Apostle Spencer W. Kimball called Brown's affirmation of civil rights in General Conference "an official statement and the Church's stand with regard to it." In Kimball journal, October 6, 1963, reel 25, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, LDS Church History Library.

64. "An Act to Prohibit Discrimination in Business and Establishments and Places for Public Accommodation and to Provide Civil Remedies for Violation Thereof," 1965, Box 24, Folder 3, J. D. Williams Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah. Utah's failure to support civil rights legislation was already a concern for civil rights activists. In 1959 and 1961, the United States Commission on Civil Rights issued two reports condemning Utah lawmakers for the state's inaction on civil rights. See "Utah's Advisory Committee," *The National Conference and the Reports of the State Advisory Committees to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1959* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Press, 1960), 375–83; "1961 Report: Utah Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights," reel 7, part 27 (Utah), Selected Branch Files, *Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* (Bethesda, Md.: University Publications of America, 1991).

65. Spencer W. Kimball journal, March 9, 1965, reel 27, Spencer W. Kimball Papers. See also "NAACP Appeals to Church," *Deseret News*, March 8, 1965.

66. Johnie M. Driver, "L.D.S. Church Leaders Should Speak Out for Moral Justice," March 9, 1965, Box 1, Folder 29, Stephen Holbrook Papers, Utah State Historical Society. Albert Fritz, who preceded Driver as the NAACP president, also observed that the "L.D.S. influence" prevented a civil rights bill from passing "because [Mormons] were in control of the legislature." In Fritz oral history interview with Leslie G. Kelen, May 5, 1983, 34, Box 2, Folder 6, Interviews with African Americans in Utah, 1982–1988, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah. Another NAACP member complained: "We all know that the major cause of discrimination against the Negro in Utah springs from a doctrine of the LDS church which holds that the Negro is cursed and not entitled to the blessings of the Priesthood." In D. H. Oliver, *A Negro on Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: D. H. Oliver, 1963), 14.

67. First Presidency Minutes, March 8, 1965, Box 59, Folder 3, David O. McKay Papers. See also editorial "A Clear Civil Rights Stand," *Deseret News*, March 9, 1965; and "Civil Rights Still Needs Patience," *Deseret News*, February 12, 1964. First Presidency counselor N. Eldon Tanner stated that civil rights "is not a moral question and therefore not a church matter." In Glen W. Davidson, "Mormon Missionaries and the Race Question," *Christian Century* 82 (September 29, 1965): 1185. See also Hugh B. Brown to Sterling M. McMurrin,

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April 9, 1965, Box 290, Folder 3, Sterling M. McMurrin Papers, Special Collection, Marriott Library, University of Utah. After resisting civil rights legislation for many years, the Utah State Legislature passed the "Anti-Discrimination Act of 1965," part of which included a public accommodations bill and a fair employment practices bill. In "1965 Session: Bill 62, Legislature House Working Bills, 1896–1989," Box 32, Folder 61, Series 432, Utah State Records and Archives Service, Salt Lake City, Utah.

68. The two men exchanged several letters during Benson's mission assignment. Benson's letters are written on European mission letterhead and are located in the Ezra Taft Benson Correspondence, JBS Headquarters, Appleton, Wisc.

69. My thanks to the Interlibrary Loan Staff at UCLA for lending the originals of Benson's *Birch Bulletin and American Opinion*. Benson wrote "ETB" in the top right-hand corner of these Birch publications.

70. Robert Welch, *Two Revolutions at Once* (Belmont, Mass.: American Opinion, 1965), 6–7.

71. Benson to Welch, August 11, 1965, Ezra Taft Benson Correspondence, JBS Headquarters, Appleton, Wisc. Welch, "What's Wrong with Civil Rights?" (Belmont, Mass.: American Opinion, 1965), n.p.

72. *Birch Bulletin* (August 2, 1965): 4. See also the September issue of the *Birch Bulletin* (September 1965), which also displayed on the front cover the caption: "fully expose the civil rights fraud and you will break the back of the communist conspiracy."

73. "Critical of the Church: NAACP Studies Action," *Deseret News*, July 2, 1965; "NAACP Asks Foreign Bar of Missionaries," *Daily Utah Chronicle*, May 6, 1965.

74. *Birch Bulletin* (September 1965): 23–24; see also Gary Allen and Bill Richardson, "Los Angeles: Hell in the City of Angels," *American Opinion* (September 1965): 1–15; Gary Allen, "The Plan to Burn Los Angeles," *American Opinion* (May 1967): 31–40. The best discussion of the Watts Riots is James T. Patterson, *The Eve of Destruction: How 1965 Transformed America* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 179–88.

75. Benson, *Enemy Hath Done This*, 69–70.

76. Benson asked President McKay for permission for Reed to join the JBS, but the president told the elder Benson that it was his decision to make. As recounted in David O. McKay journal, October 26, 1962, Box 51, Folder 5, David O. McKay Papers. See also "Reed A. Benson Takes Post in Birch Society," *Deseret News*, October 27, 1962; and Benson, *Title of Liberty*, 39.

77. Reed A. Benson "Memo to the Utah Chapters," September 2, 1965, Ezra Taft Benson Correspondence, JBS Headquarters, Appleton, Wisc.; also in Box 27, Folder 7, J. D. Williams Papers, Special Collection, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

78. "Benson Upholds Bircher Views," *Idaho Free Press*, April 22, 1965; "Bircher Asserts King Injuries Negro's Cause," *Modesto Bee*, July 21, 1965; Doug Bradley, "Reed Benson: Bircher Urges Look at Goals," *Denver Post*, April 24, 1965. See also Willard Clopton, "Cookies, Talk of Treason Served, at Opening of Birch Headquarters," *Washington Post*, September 18, 1965, in which Reed Benson also accused President Johnson of treason.

79. Reed Benson to David O. McKay, January 10, 1963, Matt Harris files (courtesy of Joe Geisner).

80. Neither Francis M. Gibbons, *Ezra Taft Benson: Statesman, Patriot, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 244, nor Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*

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(Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 382, discuss the turmoil surrounding Benson's return from Germany.

81. "NAACP Chapter Claims Riot Report 'Malicious,'" *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, September 28, 1965; "NAACP Assails Rumors of Protest at LDS Meet," *Salt Lake Tribune*, September 29, 1965; "NAACP Says 'Too Fantastic' Rumors of Demonstrations," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, September 27, 1965; "Race Riots in Utah?" *Daily Utah Chronicle*, September 28, 1965. L. Brent Goates, *Harold B. Lee: Prophet and Seer* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), 378, explained that there were "rumors of blacks invading Salt Lake City to take vengeance upon the Saints and the Church." See also William A. Wilson and Richard C. Poulsen, "The Curse of Cain and Other Stories: Blacks in Mormon Folklore," *Sunstone* 5 (Fall–Winter 1980): 10.

82. In "Memo to the Utah Chapters," Reed explained that Robert Welch had ordered the "whispering campaign."

83. For Benson's support of Reed's employment at the Birch Society, see Benson, *Title of Liberty*, 39; and David O. McKay journal, October 26, 1962, Box 51, Folder 5, David O. McKay Papers.

84. Council of the Twelve Minutes, November 4, 1965, Box 64, Folder 8, Spencer W. Kimball Papers.

85. Salt Lake City NAACP Branch Newsletter, April 1966, reel 7, part 27 (Utah), Selected Branch Files, *Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*.

86. Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006); Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York: Viking, 2011); Peniel E. Joseph, *Stokely: A Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2014); Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality.*

87. Harris and Bringhurst, *Mormon Church and Blacks*, 75–89; Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, 172–73.

88. Two nonpracticing, high-profile Latter-day Saints were the most vocal critics of the priesthood and temple ban: Stewart Udall, secretary of interior in the Kennedy administration, and Sterling McMurrin, commissioner of education in the Kennedy administration and also professor of philosophy at the University of Utah. See Stewart L. Udall, "An Appeal for Full Fellowship of the Negro," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 2 (Summer 1967): 5–7; Sterling M. McMurrin, "The Negroes Among the Mormons," Address to the Annual Banquet, Salt Lake Chapter NAACP, June 21, 1968, copy in Box 289, Folder 2, Sterling M. McMurrin Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah. Both critiques made national headlines, prompting a swift response from church authorities. See, for example, "Udall Entreats Mormons on Race," *New York Times*, May 19, 1967; "Udall Urges Mormons to End Negro Bias," *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 1967; "Udall Prods Mormons to Solve Negro Issue" *Arizona Republic*, May 19, 1967; "Stewart Udall and the Mormon Church," *Arizona Daily Star*, May 20, 1967; "Udall Asks LDS to Reexamine Negro Doctrine," *Salt Lake Tribune*, May 19, 1967; apostle Delbert L. Stapley to Stewart L. Udall, May 26, 1967, Box 209, Folder 5, Stewart L. Udall Papers, Special Collections, University of Arizona Library, University of Arizona; First Presidency Minutes, May 24, 1967, Box 65, Folder 2, David O. McKay Papers; "U Professor Rues LDS Stand Negro Stand," *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 22, 1968; "Mormon Negro Policies Called Harmful to the Church," *Middletown Journal*

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(Middletown, Ohio), June 23, 1968; "Race Issue Decried by Mormon," *Arizona Daily Citizen*, June 23, 1968; "Expert Says Racism Hurts Mormon Church," *Bridgeport Post* (Bridgeport, Conn.), June 23, 1968; "Race Policy Change Urged for Mormons," *Fort Lauderdale News-Sun-Sentinel*, June 23, 1968; "Utah Educator Raps Mormon Negro Stand," *Trenton Sunday Times Advertiser* (Trenton, N.J.), June 23, 1968; "Bias Will Drive Out Members, Mormon Warns," *Miami Herald*, June 23, 1968; "Mormon Race Practices Criticized," *Phoenix Gazette*, June 23, 1968; "Ex Commissioner of Education Raps LDS Negro Policy," *Ogden Standard Examiner*, June 22, 1968; David O. McKay journal, June 26, 1968, Box 67, Folder 6, David O. McKay Papers; and Box 14, Folder 30, Joseph Fielding Smith Papers, LDS Church History Library. For an insightful treatment of Benson's presidential aspirations, see Newell G. Bringhurst, "Potomac Fever: Continuing Quest for the U.S. Presidency" in this volume.

89. Benson, *An Enemy Hath Done This*, 310. For the Hoover speech Benson quoted, see "The FBI and Civil Rights—J. Edgar Hoover Speaks Out," *U.S. News and World Report*, November 30, 1964, 56.

90. A number of letters to the editor in the BYU student newspaper the *Daily Universe* illustrates this point. Henry J. Nicholes, October 31, 1966 ("Beliefs"); James S. Olsen, November 29, 1966 ("Poor Judgement"); Brad Larsen, November 29, 1966 ("Lumping"); Cecil Smith, December 1, 1966 ("Answers"); Steven M. Thomas, October 18, 1967 ("Ridiculous"); Jim Hurst, October 20, 1967; Betty J. McDaniel, April 24, 1968 ("Dr. King"); Judy Geissler, April 30, 1969 ("In Memoriam: M.L. King"); Gary L. Olsen, May 6, 1969 ("Geissler's King"); Judy Geissler, May 7, 1969 ("Racial Bigotry: An Open Letter"); Jerry Names, May 12, 1969 ("Disobedience Judy"); May 12, 1969, Michael Vanhille, May 12, 1969 ("King Response").

91. Larry T. Wimmer to Martin Luther King, December 2, 1966, Martin Luther King Papers, King Center, Atlanta, Georgia. Wimmer taught economics at BYU from 1963 to 2006.

92. Gustive O. Larson to Hugh B. Brown, October 26, 1966, Box 1, Folder 5, Hugh B. Brown Research Files, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU. Larson taught religion and history at BYU from 1954 to 1972. See also BYU history professors Thomas G. Alexander and Douglas F. Tobler to Ernest L. Wilkinson, November 26, 1969, Box 177, Folder 16, Ernest L. Wilkinson Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

93. Hugh B. Brown journal, August 6–12, 1967, Box 52, Folder 14, Richard D. Poll Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah. See also David O. McKay journal, September 1, 1967, Box 66, Folder 1, David O. McKay Papers.

94. McKay journal, September 22, 1967, Box 66, Folder 2, David O. McKay Papers.

95. Benson, "Trust Not the Arm of Flesh," *Improvement Era* 70 (December 1967): 55–58. Benson referenced Birch writers repeatedly throughout the talk, as well as Hoover's writings.

96. Ibid., 56.

97. Ibid.

98. Ibid., 57.

99. Ibid.

100. For the apostles' views on civil rights, see Harris and Bringhurst, *Mormon Church and Blacks*, 67–68, 74–75; Prince and Wright, *David O. McKay*, chap. 4; Bringhurst, *Saints,*

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Slaves, and Blacks, chap. 9; F. Ross Peterson, "'Blindside': Utah on the Eve of *Brown v. Board of Education*," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 73 (2005): 13–14.

101. Reed Benson to Robert Welch, November 2, 1967, Ezra Taft Benson Correspondence, JBS Headquarters, Appleton, Wisc.

102. Benson, *Civil Rights: A Tool of Communist Deception* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1968); and published the following year under the same title in Benson, *An Enemy Hath Done This*, 189–200. Remarkably, both of Benson's authorized biographies omit this address. See Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson* and Gibbons, *Ezra Taft Benson*. *Civil Rights: A Tool of Communist Deception* was widely sold throughout bookstores in Utah, including BYU. See "U.S. Journal: Provo, Utah," *New Yorker*, March 21, 1970, 122.

103. Petersen, "Our Divine Destiny," *BYU Speeches* (February 20, 1968): https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/mark-e-petersen_divine-destiny/. See also his April 1968 conference address, "America and God," *Improvement Era* 71 (June 1968): 76–79; and G. Homer Durham, "The Racial Revolution in America," *Improvement Era* 71 (October 1968): 93–95.

104. Ernest L. Wilkinson memo, "Confidential," to BYU Religion Dean Roy Doxey, February 20, 1968, Box 443, Folder 11, Ernest L. Wilkinson Presidential Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU; Wilkinson diary, February 20, 1968, Box 102, Folder 5, Ernest L. Wilkinson Papers.

105. Ezra Taft Benson memo to General Authorities, re: Martin Luther King, April 6, 1968, MS d 4936, LDS Church History Library (my thanks to church archivist William Slaughter for providing a copy); also in Box 63, Folder 1, Spencer W. Kimball Papers. Benson also sent the memo to his close friend, J. Willard Marriott. See Benson to Marriott, May 1, 1969, Box 12, Folder 23, J. Willard Marriott Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah. Brown's grandson Edwin Firmage recalled that his grandfather was "heartsick" over Benson's memo and believed that the Birch Society was responsible for it. In Edwin B. Firmage oral history interview with Gregory A. Prince, June 6, 1995, Matt Harris files. See also Charlie Brown oral history interview with Gregory A. Prince, Mary 24, 1996. My thanks to Greg Prince for sharing these transcripts with me. Some Latter-day Saints complained that church leaders did not observe President Johnson's "national day of mourning" for Dr. King. See letters to the editor, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3 (Summer 1968): 5–7.

106. Benson to the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, April 18, 1968, Box 67, Folder 4, David O. McKay Papers.

107. Benson, "The Book of Mormon Warns America" (May 21, 1968), in *An Enemy Hath Done This*, 334–35. See also Benson, "Americans are Destroying America," *Improvement Era* 71 (June 1968): 68–71.

108. G. Roy Fugal to President Harold B. Lee, March 27, 1970, Box 63, Folder 3, Spencer W. Kimball Papers; Bishop Victor L. Brown memo to General Authorities re: Security during General Conference, April 2, 1970, reel 34, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, ibid.; Spencer W. Kimball journal, April 4–5, 1970, reel 34; L. Brent Goates, *Harold B. Lee: Prophet and Seer* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), 413–14; Heidi S. Swinton, *To the Rescue: The Biography of Thomas S. Monson* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 365–66; Susan Peterson, "The Great and Dreadful Day: Mormon Folklore of the Apocalypse," in Eric A. Eliason and Tom Mould, eds., *Latter-day Lore: Mormon Folklore Stories* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2013), 269.

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109. For two seminal accounts of the BYU athletic protests, see J. B. Haws, *The Mormon Image in the American Mind: Fifty Years of Public Perception* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), chap. 3; and Gary James Bergera, "'This Time of Crisis': The Race-Based Anti-BYU Athletic Protests of 1968–1971," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 81 (Summer 2013): 204–229. For a broader context to the BYU athletic protests, consult Darron T. Smith, *When Race, Religion, and Sport Collide: Black Athletes at BYU and Beyond* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), chap. 4.

110. Bergera, "This Time of Crisis"; Haws, *Mormon Image*; William F. Reed, "The Other Side of 'the Y'," *Sports Illustrated*, January 26, 1970; *New Yorker* (March 21, 1970): 120–25; "The Angry Black Athlete," *Newsweek*, July 15, 1968; "Trouble in Happy Valley," *Newsweek*, December 1, 1969; "Mormons and the Mark of Cain," *Time*, January 19, 1970 46; "Pigskin Justice and Mormon Theology," *Christian Century* 87 (January 21, 1970): 67. See also stories in the *Los Angeles Times*, August 27, 1967; *Miami Herald*, April 12, 1968; *Arizona Daily Star*, April 14, 1968; *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 20, 1969; *The Mercury*, December 30, 1969; *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, March 28, 1970; *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, October 27, 1970.

111. The resolution, proposed by the University of Utah, called for WAC teams to "sever all relations" with BYU until its "discriminatory" policies "are eliminated." In Wilkinson memo to Board of Trustees, re: "Charges of 'Racism' and 'Bigotry' Against the LDS Church," October 29, 1969, 6, MSS 5 C, 1969, "Compiled Information Concerning African Americans, BYU, and the Church," L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

112. In 1968 and 1970, according to statistics that BYU filed with the U.S. Office for Civil Rights, 0.03 percent of the student body were "Negroes." In Box 42, Folder 11, Robert K. Thomas Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. WAC officials criticized BYU officials for not recruiting black students or athletes. See Wilkinson memo to Board of Trustees, re: "Charges of 'Racism' and 'Bigotry' Against the LDS Church," October 29, 1969, 8–10.

113. The Ernest L. Wilkinson Presidential Papers contains dozens of letters between his administration and members of the civil rights committee who investigated the alleged civil rights violations. In Box 463, Folders 19–20, Ernest L. Wilkinson Presidential Papers.

114. Wilkinson memo to Board of Trustees, re: "Charges of 'Racism' and 'Bigotry' Against the LDS Church," October 29, 1969, 9. In particular, protestors at the University of Washington criticized the church for its "racist" scriptures. They focused intently on the Book of Mormon. See Ernest L. Wilkinson to Alfred J. Schweppe, June 12, 1970, Box 42, Folder 11, Robert K. Thomas Papers. BYU academic vice president Robert K. Thomas asked BYU Religion dean Daniel H. Ludlow to draft a report outlining the alleged racist scriptures. In Thomas memo to Ludlow, "New Curriculum in the College of Religion," June 8, 1970, Box 27, Folder 8, Register of the Records of the College of Instruction, 1960–1973. Ludlow's report can be found in a memo to BYU President Ernest L. Wilkinson, June 11, 1970, Box 15, Folder 3.

115. Benson to Joseph Fielding Smith, March 3, 1966, reel 6, Ezra Taft Benson Papers, LDS Church History Library.

116. Cleon Skousen, "The Communist Attack on the Mormons," March 1970, in "Special Report by National Research Group," American Fork, Utah, p. 1. Skousen also addressed BYU students, in which he besmirched King and the civil rights movement. See

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Skousen, "Know the Truth to Stay Free," speech to BYU students in 1971: http://www.latterdayconservative.com/articles/know-the-truth-to-stay-free/. Skousen also criticized King to BYU president Ernest Wilkinson. In Skousen memo to Wilkinson, January 23, 1970, Box 177, Folder 16, Ernest L. Wilkinson Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold L. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. Benson and Skousen were neighbors in Midway, Utah, and fellow Birch sympathizers. Though Skousen never joined the Birch Society, he was sympathetic to their cause. In 1963 he published a twelve-page pamphlet defending the Society against critics. Cleon Skousen, *The Communist Attack on the John Birch Society* (Salt Lake City: Ensign Publishing, 1963).

117. Benson, "To the Humble Followers of Christ," *Improvement Era* 72 (June 1969): 43.

118. Goates, *Harold B. Lee*, 433–34; Kimball journal, February 18, 1970, reel 34, Spencer W. Kimball Papers.

119. Mark E. Petersen asked J. Willard Marriott and other businessmen to attend the meeting. In Petersen to Marriott, February 5, 1970, Box 52, Folder 14, J. Willard Marriott Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah; and Goates, *Harold B. Lee*, 434.

120. For McKay's support of Benson's anti–civil rights' position, see McKay journal, September 22, 1967, Box 66, Folder 2, David O. McKay Papers. McKay himself opposed civil rights, but there is no evidence he believed that communists had infiltrated the civil rights movement. For McKay and Benson's complicated relationship, and for McKay's views on civil rights, see Prince and Wright, *David O. McKay*, chap. 4. For McKay's successors cracking down on Benson, see Harris, "Watchman on the Tower"; and D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 107–8.

121. Kimball recounts several instances in his journal when he called in Benson to chastise him for publicly expressing his right-wing views. In Kimball journal, February 22, 1974, March 15, 1974, November 5, 1974, all in reel 39, Spencer W. Kimball Papers. Kimball also scolded Benson for a controversial speech he gave at BYU in 1980. In Leonard J. Arrington Journal, June 17, 1980, Box 34, Folder 6, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University. For Kimball's universalist vision of the Mormon gospel, see Edward L. Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride: The Presidency of Spencer W. Kimball—Working Draft* (Salt Lake City: Benchmark Books, 2009), chaps. 14, 24.

122. This important event is covered in Edward L. Kimball, "Spencer W. Kimball and the Revelation on Priesthood," *BYU Studies* 47 (Spring 2008): 5–85; Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride*, chaps. 21–22; and Harris and Bringhurst, *Mormon Church and Blacks*, 105–9.

123. Benson's biographers, Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 457, and Gibbons, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 282, both explain that his support for the priesthood revelation was warm and genuine. There is no evidence that Benson discussed the revelation in public, although Benson's colleagues in church leadership did. See Gordon B. Hinckley, "Priesthood Restoration," *Ensign* 18 (October 1988): 69–72; David B. Haight, "This Work is True," *Ensign* 26 (May 1996): 23; and Bruce R. McConkie, "New Revelation on Priesthood," in *Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 126–37.

124. David L. Chappell, *Waking from the Dream: The Struggle for Civil Rights in the Shadow of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Random House, 2014), 102–5, 110–19. For

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Bircher opposition to the proposed MLK holiday, see Hon. Larry McDonald (R-Georgia), "Americans, Stop Thinking Like Communists," June 18, 1980, *Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 96th Congress*, Second Session, 1–8.

125. "Holiday opponent says King exceeded Lucifer," *Arizona Republic*, October 5, 1989; "Bigotry rides again," *Arizona Republic*, October 6, 1989; "Sanders' letter angers his allies," *Phoenix Gazette*, October 6, 1989. Steve Benson affirmed that he leaked the letters to the Arizona newspaper in an email to Matt Harris, November 6, 2014 (my thanks to Benson for sharing his insights).

126. PR statement quoting Benson in ibid. Benson read this statement when he was first inaugurated as the church president. In Don Searle, "President Ezra Taft Benson Ordained Thirteenth President of the Church," *Ensign* (December 1985): https://www.lds.org/ensign/1985/12/president-ezra-taft-benson-ordained-thirteenth-president-of-the-church?lang=eng.

127. Terry Lee Williams, an African American legislator from Salt Lake City and sponsor of the MLK bill in Utah, explained that his colleagues opposed the King holiday because "King was associated with communists." In Terry Lee Williams oral history with Leslie G. Kelen, April 4, 1986, 62, 67, Box 7, Folder 5, Interviews with Blacks in Utah, 1982–1988, Special Collections, Marriot Library, University of Utah. See also Rev. France A. Davis and Nayra A. Atiya, *France Davis: An American Story Told* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2007), 272. Davis is an influential Baptist minister in Salt Lake City and a leading civil rights supporter in the state. He played a pivotal role getting the Utah Legislature to support the King holiday. See John Devilbiss, "Utah, region balks at King holiday," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, January 11, 1986; and Julie Howard, "Legislator proposes renaming holiday," *Daily Universe*, January 13, 2000. For Mormon complaints about the bill, see Kim Olsen to Gunn McKay, March 2, 1979, Box 450, Folder 4. K. Gunn McKay Papers, Special Collections, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University; and Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy*, 113, 471 n. 372. One Benson supporter—a prominent Bircher in Utah County—even balked when BYU invited Coretta Scott King, Martin's widow, to campus. Joel Ferguson to Ezra Taft Benson, Brigham Young Board of Trustees, Commissioner Henry D. Eyring, President Jeffery R. Holland, January 17, 1986, Box 15, Folder 6, Paul C. Richards Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

128. Utah was the last state to recognize the King holiday. In Dawn House, "Civil rights speaker questions Utah's history with Martin Luther King, Jr. Day," *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 17, 2012.

129. "The Globe Reacts to Gordon B. Hinckley's Passing," *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 29, 2008; "Tributes to President Hinckley," *Ensign* 38 (March 2008): 4. Hinckley also addressed the NAACP. His sermon can be found in *Discourses of President Gordon B. Hinckley—Volume 1: 1995–1999*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 1:532–38. For newspaper coverage of the address, see Peg McEntee, "Families Can Save Us, Hinkley Says," *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 25, 1998; Lois M. Collins, "Bridge Racial Barriers, Hinckley Says," *Deseret News*, April 25, 1998; "Hinckley Speaks at NAACP Meeting," *Ogden Standard Examiner*, April 25, 1998. Hinckley's friendship with members of the NAACP leadership is discussed in "World Mourns Beloved Leader," *Deseret News*, January 28, 2008. Hinckley's outreach to the black community is well chronicled in Haws, *Mormon Image*, 175–81; Mauss, *All Abraham's Children*, 250–51. See also Darius Gray and Margaret Young, in "*Nobody Knows:*

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The Untold Story of Black Mormons—Script," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 42 (Fall 2009): 124–25.

130. Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Need for Greater Kindness," *Ensign* 36 (May 2006): 58–61. See also Hinckley, "This Is the Work of the Master," *Ensign* 25 (May 1995): 69–71; and especially Hinckley, *Standing for Something: 10 Neglected Virtues That Will Heal Our Hearts and Homes* (New York: Times Books, 2000), 47, depicting his racial sensitivity.

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